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AUTHOR Janko, Susan
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ABSTRACT

Based on a study conducted in an intervention program for parents of maltreated children, this book examines the well intended but often ineffective efforts of the child welfare system to prevent maltreatment, as illustrated by the experiences of three parents targeted by the state's child protection agency, and urges more far-reaching policy changes to coordinate earlier and more diverse kinds of support for children and families. Following an introductory chapter describing determinants of child abuse and the study's data collection, chapter 2 presents the three parents' stories and their family histories. Chapter 3 examines the procedures for substantiating child maltreatment and subsequent legal intervention. Chapter 4 explores the potentially intergenerational nature of child abuse, the influence of poverty, and the functions of child protective services. Chapter 5 describes the relationships between parents and child protection workers, and how caseworker misperceptions can aggravate their interactions. This chapter also suggests a more preventive model of child welfare service than the current system, noting that those parents "in the system" who were able to bring about change in their lives did so not because of a single agency but rather because of intervention and support from a variety of sources. Chapter 6 explores how compliance with child welfare contracts will often help a parent gain back her children, but may not bring about long-lasting changes in the problems that precipitated the maltreatment. This chapter also discusses how the child welfare system should be changed: (1) intervention should be provided before abuse incidents occur; (2) interventions should be of sufficient duration and reflect the characteristics and dynamics of the problems they are trying to address; (3) intervention should be

delivered by highly trained and skilled interventionists; (4) child welfare programs should shift from a deficit model to one of fostering parents' strengths and empowering them to take control over services, monetary support, and informational sources; and (5) support and empowerment must occur within communities rather than solely within individuals and agencies. A final chapter explores the "why" and "how" of change, including concepts of risks and models of intervention. A description of the study's methods are appended. Contains 108 references. (HTH)

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